

What is claimed is:

1. A printer controller that receives print jobs transmitted from a plurality of terminals, and instructs a printer to perform print processing, the printer controller comprising:

10 a detector that detects pieces of operation information, each relating to a current operation state of one of the plurality of terminals;

15 a priority determining unit that determines priority levels for a plurality of print jobs waiting to be printed, a priority level of a print job determined based on a piece of operation information detected by the detector from a terminal that transmitted the print job; and

20 a controller that instructs the printer to process the plurality of print jobs in an order based on the determined priority levels.

2. The printer controller of Claim 1, wherein the detector

25 detects, as the piece of operation information, a non-operational period during which the terminal has not been operated.

3. The printer controller of Claim 2, wherein the priority determining unit sets a higher priority level for (a) a print job from a terminal with a non-operational period that exceeds a specified value than for (b) a print job from a terminal  
5 with a non-operational period that is no more than the specified value.

4. The printer controller of Claim 2, wherein the priority determining unit sets higher priority levels for print jobs  
10 from terminals with longer non-operational periods.

5. The printer controller of Claim 1, wherein the detector detects each of the pieces of operation information based on a signal transmitted from each terminal, each signal being generated when an input device for a terminal is operated.  
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6. The printer controller of Claim 1, further comprising:  
an elapsed time measuring unit for measuring an elapsed time since each print job was received,  
20 wherein the priority determining unit changes the priority level of a print job when a corresponding measured elapsed time exceeds a specified value.

7. An image forming apparatus that receives print jobs transmitted from a plurality of terminals, and performs print processing, the image forming apparatus comprising:

- an image forming unit that performs print processing
- 5 corresponding to the received print jobs;
- a detector that detects pieces of operation information, each relating to a current operation state of one of the plurality of terminals;
- a priority determining unit that determines priority levels for a plurality of print jobs waiting to be printed, a priority level of a print job determined based on a piece of operation information detected by the detector from a terminal that transmitted the print job; and
- 15 a controller that instructs the image forming unit to process the plurality of print jobs in an order based on the determined priority levels.

8. The image forming apparatus of Claim 7, wherein the detector detects, as the piece of operation information, a non-operational period during which the terminal has not been operated.

20 9. The image forming apparatus of Claim 7, wherein the

detector detects each of the pieces of operation information based on a signal transmitted from each terminal, each signal being generated when an input device for a terminal is operated.

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10. The image forming apparatus of Claim 7, further comprising:

an elapsed time measuring unit for measuring an elapsed time since each print job was received,

10       wherein the priority determining unit changes the priority level of a print job when a corresponding measured elapsed time exceeds a specified value.

15       11. A terminal that transmits print jobs to a printer controller controlling a printer shared with a plurality of other terminals, the terminal comprising:

20       a receiving unit that receives a print job input by an operator;

25       a timer that measures an elapsed time since an input device that includes the receiving unit was last operated; and

30       a transmission controller that transmits the input print job after waiting for the timer to measure a specified time.

12. A printer controller that receives print jobs transmitted from a plurality of terminals, and controls a printer to perform print processing, the printer controller comprising:

5 a detector that detects whether an operator is in a vicinity of each terminal;

a priority determining unit that determines priority levels for a plurality of print jobs waiting to be printed, a priority level of a print job determined based on a detection result produced by the detector for a terminal that transmitted the print job; and

10 a controller that controls the printer so that the plurality of print jobs are processed in an order based on the determined priority levels.

15 13. A printer controller that receives print jobs transmitted from a plurality of terminals, and instructs a printer to perform print processing, the printer controller comprising:

20 memory that stores each of the received print jobs in correspondence with information indicating a transmission origin terminal;

a first timer that measures, for each terminal, an elapsed

time since reception of a most recent print job;

a priority determining unit that determines a priority level for each terminal according to the measured elapsed times; and

5 a controller that instructs the printer to process the plurality of print jobs stored in the memory in an order based on the determined priority levels.

14. The printer controller of Claim 13, wherein the priority determining unit sets a higher priority level for (a) a print job from a terminal with an elapsed time exceeding a specified value than for (b) a print job from a terminal with an elapsed time no more than the specified value.

15. The printer controller of Claim 13, wherein the priority determining unit sets higher priority levels for print jobs from terminals with longer elapsed times.

16. The printer controller of Claim 13, further comprising:

20 a second timer that measures an elapsed time since each print job was received,

wherein the priority determining unit changes the priority

level of a print job when a corresponding measured elapsed time exceeds a specified value.

17. An image forming apparatus for receiving print jobs  
5 from a plurality of terminals, the image forming apparatus comprising:

an image forming unit that performs print processing corresponding to the received print jobs;

memory that stores each received print job in correspondence with information indicating a transmission origin terminal;

a first timer that measures, for each terminal, an elapsed time since a print job was last received;

a priority determining unit that determines a priority level for each terminal according to the measured elapsed times; and

a controller that instructs the image forming unit to process the plurality of print jobs stored in the memory in an order based on the determined priority levels.

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18. The image forming apparatus of Claim 17, wherein the priority determining unit sets a higher priority level for (a) a print job from a terminal with an elapsed time exceeding a

specified value than for (b) a print job from a terminal with an elapsed time no more than the specified value.

19. The image forming apparatus of Claim 17, wherein the 5 priority determining unit sets higher priority levels for print jobs from terminals with longer elapsed times.

20. The image forming apparatus of Claim 17, further comprising:

40 a second timer that measures an elapsed time since each print job was received,

wherein the priority determining unit changes the priority level of a print job when a corresponding measured elapsed time exceeds a specified value.

21. A printer controller that receives print jobs transmitted from a plurality of terminals, and controls a printer to perform print processing, the printer controller comprising:

20 memory that stores each of the received print jobs in correspondence with information indicating a transmission origin terminal;

a transmission control unit that transmits a request signal

requesting transmission of a piece of print processing information for a print job to the transmission origin terminal; and

5 a controller that receives the piece of print processing information transmitted from the terminal that received the request signal, and controls the printer so as to perform print processing of the job, based on the received piece of print processing information.

10 22. The printer controller of Claim 21, wherein the piece of print processing information is a piece of processing priority information indicating a processing priority level of a print job.

15 23. The printer controller of Claim 22, wherein the piece of processing priority information is input by an operator into a terminal input device.

20 24. The printer controller of Claim 22, wherein the piece of processing priority information is generated according to an amount of time during which an operator has not operated a terminal.

25. The printer controller of Claim 21, wherein the transmission control unit transmits the request signal when the printer is available to process a new print job.

5 26. An image forming apparatus that receives print jobs transmitted from a plurality of terminals, and performs print processing, the image forming apparatus comprising:

an image forming unit that performs print processing corresponding to the print jobs;

10 memory that stores each of the received print jobs in correspondence with information indicating a transmission origin terminal;

15 a transmission control unit that transmits a request signal requesting transmission of a piece of print processing information to a transmission origin terminal of a print job stored in the memory; and

20 a controller that receives the piece of print processing information transmitted from the terminal that received the request signal, and controls the image forming unit so as to perform print processing of the print job, based on the received piece of print processing information.

27. The image forming apparatus of Claim 26, wherein each

piece of print processing information is a piece of processing priority information indicating a processing priority level of a print job.

5        28. The image forming apparatus of Claim 26, wherein the transmission control unit transmits the request signal when the printer is available to process a new print job.

10        29. A terminal that transmits print jobs to a printer controller, the terminal comprising:

15        an information generating unit that generates a piece of print processing information indicating processing of a print job that has already been transmitted to the printer controller;

20        a reception control unit that receives a request signal requesting the transmission of the piece of print processing information from the printer controller; and

25        a transmission control unit that transmits the piece of print processing information generated when the request signal is received, in response to the request signal.

30. The terminal of Claim 29, wherein the piece of print processing information is a piece of processing priority

information indicating a processing priority level of a print job.